



Eastern Connecticut RC&D

Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc.
139 Wolf Den Road, Brooklyn, CT 06234 * (860) 774-0224 * www.easterncrd-ct.org

John Guskowski, President
Philip Chester, Vice President
Barbara Kelly, Treasurer
Margot Burns, Secretary

February 23, 2011

To: Environment Committee

Testimony in Support of: H.B. 5376: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS FOR THE COMMUNITY FARMS PROGRAM

Submitted by: John Guskowski, Board Chairman, Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc.

The Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc. is an independent, nonprofit agency that works to improve the viability of Connecticut's farms, the sustainability of Connecticut's environment, and the vitality of its communities.

In my role as Chairman of this group, I was appointed in 2007 to the Connecticut Preservation Advisory Board as a representative of an organization whose mission includes farmland preservation, pursuant to Public Act 07-162. I further chaired the subcommittee of this Advisory Board that created the criteria for the Community Farms Program when that program was created in 2008. *Unfortunately, the program has not yet been funded.*

The main Farmland Preservation Program was established in 1979 with a focus on preserving farmland for future food production capacity as well as contributing to the agricultural sector. Since that time, the agriculture sector has changed dramatically. Interest in local food and community access to local agriculture has increased interest in food production capacity on small as well as large parcels of farmland. Agriculture businesses are also showing capacity to function on relatively smaller parcels compared to decades ago. Today 64% of Connecticut's farms are less than 50 acres.

The new Community Farms program was created to protect farms that are important to a community, but do not qualify for the Farmland Preservation Program, often because they are too small (less than 30 acre threshold) or not in a cluster of farmland. Many provide ideal conditions for access to local agriculture for large populations. These types of farms are highly valued by communities seeking to maintain a connection to agriculture activity and its historical contribution to town character.

The Community Farms Program is ready to start protecting farms. My subcommittee of the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Advisory Board worked diligently with the Department of Agriculture and several partnering organizations to create an excellent set of criteria to ensure that the State of Connecticut only invests in farms that will continue to provide outstanding agricultural, historical, and cultural benefits to their communities for decades to come. *The program needs \$1 million per year in FY 2012 and FY2013 to begin protecting these valuable resources.*

H.B. 5376 would create bond authorization separate from bond funding for the Farmland Preservation Program. There is an overwhelming demand for the Farmland Preservation Program and preservation of community farms should not come at the expense of or in competition with protection of larger parcels.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue.